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as crafts, while learning about self-esteem and personal development. Staff mentor students and offer advice on how to solve problems.

“The girls are very protective of the Girls Academy and their friends. The idea of being a woman and a strong, valuable woman has really grown among the students,” Janette says.

“We are also working tirelessly to encourage Aboriginal boys to come to school – and get here on time.”

The Yule Brook Football Academy, run through the Clontarf Foundation, works with Aboriginal boys on life skills, attendance and succeeding at school.

A special bus collects students from their homes in the morning. This has helped to improve attendance rates and punctuality among Aboriginal male students.

“It’s not all about football – it’s about being a good person and coming to school,” says Janette. “But football is the hook.”

“The boys get the opportunity to play football across the State and have contact with good, strong footy mentors. Those who are talented get a chance to progress.”

The school has certainly come a long way in the five years since Big Picture was introduced. Last year it was a finalist for the WA Secondary School of the Year in the WA Education Awards for its whole-of-school approach to engaging students and their families, improved NAPLAN results and cultural change. **sm**



- 01** Assistant principal Greg Lowry holds a tutoring session with Bevan Hayden, Adam Merrick and Brett Woods.
- 02** Principal Janette Gee and teacher Lisa Bennett help Daniel Courcha work on his mind map.
- 03** Monique Matesich and Isabela Jordan practice the guitar during a lesson with teacher Darron Acott.

# Keeping it real

‘One student at a time in a community of learners’ – that’s the motto which has helped Yule Brook College transform itself and the futures of its students. **Claudine Ledwidge-O’Reilly** finds out how the Big Picture model has boosted student attendance and performance since it was introduced five years ago.

**G**iving students opportunities to have real world experiences to help them decide what they are interested in studying has made school more relevant for many.

“We give students real life skills and it helps develop their aspirations,” says principal Janette Gee. “This occurs with the support of the community and the students’ families.”

Proof of the school’s success is in recent NAPLAN results which showed not one student was below the benchmark for reading, writing and numeracy.

As an Aboriginal Innovation School, it is also working closely with the local Aboriginal community to promote the benefits of getting a good education. Forty per cent of students are Aboriginal.

“It’s been fantastic working with the Aboriginal community and our partnership with them is very strong,” says Janette. “As a Big Picture school we don’t just engage students, we engage their families as well.”

Big Picture was originally founded in the ghettos of the United States to give children from low socioeconomic backgrounds hopes and dreams for the future. Students set their own individual learning plans and

attendance targets, and present their work to family, friends and teachers at the end of term.

“The whole idea is that students are accountable for their own learning and they celebrate it as well,” says Janette. “Their parents also get to see how important it is. We want to get more students into tertiary education. This starts by making students and their families aware it is a real and viable possibility.”

The Big Picture model was introduced to the school in 2007 to address challenging behaviour and tension among students which also affected staff.

Now the environment and culture of the school is vastly improved. A change of culture was brought about by staff who introduced new programs and adopted Big Picture principles.

“The change in culture was led by staff who now hold the new culture dear and are very protective of it. This new culture is still evolving,” Janette says.

The staff’s hard work is paying dividends for students, with regular student attendance of girls in the first term of 2011 almost doubling the same period the previous year.

This success was due, in part, to the establishment of a Girls Academy where female students get to do activities such

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